

## **ARTICLE 31: CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING**

### **PURPOSE AND POLICY**

- 31.1 The provisions of this Article are intended to create and foster a work environment conducive to the career development and training of bargaining unit members. The Parties agree to support and encourage individuals in developing their knowledge, skills, and abilities, and in contributing to the more effective utilization of available human and material resources in service to the Agency.
- 31.2 The Parties will encourage individuals to take advantage of educational opportunities and training that enhance work efficiency and provide skills needed for advancement based on Agency priorities and the availability of training funds. While stationed in Washington, FS Officers are encouraged to seek out training to develop management, leadership, and other skills necessary to the Agency's mission.
- 31.3 At each stage of their career, FS Officers should use the assessment tools available on the Agency's Intranet (FASTnet) and discussions with their supervisors to identify key skills they need to develop/improve and to craft an Individual Development Plan (IDP) to accomplish this task (see sections below). For example: career candidates and junior officers should strengthen basic supervisory and cross-cultural communications skills and become familiar with post budget planning and oversight and Embassy structure and functions; mid-career officers should improve office and personnel management and communications skills such as public speaking; Senior Foreign Service Officers should enhance all facets of their management and leadership skills and knowledge of U.S. governmental processes which impact agriculture. Throughout their careers, all FS Officers should continuously work to improve their foreign language skills.
- 31.4 Prior to or soon after return to a Washington assignment, individuals should familiarize themselves with available training and fellowships in topics such as management, leadership, presentation and communication skills, and Congressional Relations at various levels, by consulting the Training Handbook on FASTnet. They should use the IDP process (see sections below) to identify their development needs and accomplish as much of the relevant training as possible, while in Washington. To develop the skills specific to assignments abroad, individuals should refer to the appropriate sections on the Training Handbook on FASTnet and accomplish as much of this training as possible prior to onward assignment.
- 31.5 Training opportunities shall be given fairly, equitably, and consistent with affirmative action and other broad staff development goals and will be founded upon conformance with and subject to the following:

- a. The Government Employee Training Act and regulations issued pursuant thereto;
  - b. the Equal Employment Opportunity Act, as amended;
  - c. the Affirmative Action Plan;
  - d. the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended;
  - e. available resources allocated for training purposes;
  - f. the applicable provisions of the settlement of the EEO Class Complaint 890216, EEO Docket Number 033-89-9279; and,
  - g. any other applicable statutory or regulatory provisions.
- 31.6 The Agency agrees to assist individuals in planning and completing a plan of career development and training.
- 31.7 The Agency agrees to notify individuals of selection, and an attempt will be made to notify individuals of non-selection, for an Agency-controlled training or educational opportunity for which they applied. In cases of non-selection, the individual may request in writing and receive a written explanation for the denial.
- 31.8 Where an institution of higher learning requires verification of on-the-job experience, the Agency shall verify that the individual does work for the Agency, the position description, series, job title, years worked for the Agency, and training history for the immediately prior five (5) year period. The Agency shall verify this information within 10 work days of the individual's written request. The Agency's response shall be in the form (e.g., letter, fax, e-mail, memorandum, telephone call) requested by the individual.
- 31.9 The Agency shall make payment for all authorized expenses in connection with approved training. Authorized training expenses include tuition, registration fees, books, transportation and parking for day-time courses only, and miscellaneous expenses approved in advance by the SPO, such as tapes and dictionaries. School supplies, such as pencils, notebooks, and backpacks, student fees related to college or university courses, and late fees will not be reimbursed.

## DEFINITIONS

- 31.10 Training: An activity undertaken to increase the knowledge, competency, ability, and skills of individuals, which are related to their current duties and responsibilities and/or mission related developmental training.
- 31.11 Career Development: An activity undertaken to increase the knowledge, competency, ability, and skill of individuals in the performance of those duties which support the Agency mission and performance goals. These include potential duties in a different job or occupation at the same or higher level than the one currently held.

## TRAINING

- 31.12 It shall be a major goal to improve, in general, the job performance of all individuals through the establishment of fair and equitable opportunities for training within clearly defined career fields.
- 31.13 The following approaches to individual training will be utilized, as appropriate:
- a. In-house, external, or on-the-job training to improve individual capabilities to perform their current duties;
  - b. training and detail assignments in complementary positions;
  - c. enrollment of individuals in part-time educational programs at local educational institutions and/or in correspondence courses; and,
  - d. competitive, long-term training in Federal and non-Federal educational institutions, training which, because of its duration and/or scope, provides development beyond the needs of an individual's position.
- 31.14 Normally at the time of the interim review, as well as immediately subsequent to performance evaluation, or at any other time necessary, supervisors shall discuss with individuals training needs and opportunities that would help the individual to improve performance in his/her current position. Unscheduled discussions concerning an individual's training needs and performance improvement opportunities may be initiated by the individual or the supervisor.
- 31.15 Individuals shall receive training and/or orientation appropriate for any job in which they are placed or to which they are reassigned.
- 31.16 When training is requested primarily to prepare individuals for advancement or if the requested training would fulfill specific qualification requirements for a position with

known promotion potential, selection for such training will be made under competitive procedures.

- 31.17 Job-related training shall be provided on an equitable basis among work unit individuals who require such training.
- 31.18 When membership in a professional organization is not a trainer-determined or vendor- determined prerequisite for attendance at a training session, the Agency shall not consider membership as the sole factor in determining which individuals will receive the training.

#### NEW PROCESSES AND TRAINING

- 31.19 The Agency agrees to meet, consult, and bargain, if requested, with AFSA/FAS when new skills are necessary, as a result of the introduction of new equipment and/or new processes which affect or impact the working conditions of the involved individuals.
- 31.20 The Agency agrees to notify AFSA/FAS, as soon as practicable, of proposed installation of any new equipment, machinery, or processes, which would result in changes in work assignments or require additional training of bargaining unit members, and to bargain, if requested, said changes.
- 31.21 The Parties agree, upon request by either Party, to meet and discuss, in good faith, the possibility of instituting programs to train or retrain individuals in new skills, so as to assure an adequate supply of available individuals trained in these new skills. Written requests for such a meeting shall identify the purpose thereof.
- 31.22 In order to affect a smoother transition to automated processes, the Agency will include AFSA/FAS in the planning process for training courses or on-the-job training to effectively enable affected individuals to perform job duties, as well as provide for requisite staff development. The Agency will inform AFSA/FAS of planned changes and schedule the training through the IRM coordinating process or other appropriate means.

#### CAREER DEVELOPMENT

- 31.23 Individuals shall be given reasonable opportunity and reasonable time necessary to discuss their career development with their supervisors and the SPO staff.
- 31.24 The Agency agrees to play an active role in notifying and nominating bargaining unit members for various specialized career development programs.
- 31.25 Both parties recognize that an individual may become dissatisfied with his/her job

because of limited advancement possibilities or changing career goals. In such cases, the Agency agrees that an individual may request a meeting with the appropriate Agency representative for the purpose of career counseling.

- 31.26 Training while on foreign assignment to improve job-related skills shall be offered, subject to the availability of funds, as appropriate to meet office needs. Individuals on foreign assignments are encouraged to seek out significant career development training opportunities, especially in the areas of marketing, strategic planning, management, and supervisory training. Travel to the United States to attend these training courses will be provided, when approved at post and by the Area Officer.

#### CAREER DEVELOPMENT FACILITIES

- 31.27 The Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services (FFAS) Career Development Center (CDC) is intended to be a one-stop, comprehensive development facility to provide a variety of activities and services to individuals at all stages of their careers. The emphasis is on career enhancement through self assessment, self-paced learning, confidential career counseling, and referral services.

- 31.28 The services and activities of the CDC will consist of, but are not limited to:

- a. providing confidential career counseling/development advice to help individuals identify training and professional development opportunities,
- b. providing training resources;
- c. providing referral services;
- d. providing information to individuals on career-related topics, i.e., Individual Development Plans, resume preparation, and interviewing techniques;
- e. administering tools for assessing and/or diagnosing skills and career interests;
- f. facilitating mentoring programs;
- g. supporting the Agency's cross training and retraining efforts; and,
- h. supporting workshops.

- 31.29 To the extent that available resources permit, the Agency agrees to continue to provide these services and activities through the CDC.

- 31.30 Changes made in the location of the CDC, individual access, services offered by the CDC, hours of accessibility, and any other changes in the method which CDC provides services and activities will require advance bargaining with AFSA/FAS in accordance with applicable law, Executive Order, and this Agreement.
- 31.31 Individuals located in the same duty station but not the same building as the CDC may request approval from their supervisors to commute from their work units to utilize the services and activities provided. When assigned to field offices, individuals may request assistance from these centers via internal or external methods of communication.
- 31.32 The Agency supports the use of the Family Liaison Office, Overseas Briefing Center (OBC), and the Language Lab at the Department of State, and the Community Liaison Office at post for both individuals and their families.
- 31.33 The Agency will pay for the State Department's 5-day Retirement Planning Seminar for all bargaining unit members. The following restrictions apply:
- a. Members must be within five years of retirement age (i.e., 45 years of age) to be eligible.
  - b. Members who have taken the Seminar may not repeat it in less than 5 years.
  - c. The Agency will not pay travel or per diem costs for the sole purpose of attending the Seminar to members not based in Washington. Members overseas who have announced their retirement and are returning to the United States may receive 5 days per diem providing their travel orders contain a stop in Washington D.C. for other purposes.

#### INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (IDP)

- 31.34 Supervisors and their employees shall discuss and complete a skills checklist to identify short and medium-term training needs for individuals serving in Washington. The results of the skills checklist will provide the framework for the IDP. Training needs for both the duties the individual currently performs and career development will be considered with priority given to the former.
- 31.35 The IDP is a tool by which the individual and Agency identify desired training for the upcoming training year and will, to the extent possible, be adhered to by the Agency, recognizing that receipt of identified training is contingent on Agency priorities and the availability of training funds.
- 31.36 If the supervisor agrees that skills under the core competencies as listed in the

appropriate skills checklist have been mastered, that no formal job-related training is needed, and the employee seeks no other training, then the employee's IDP need only reflect any ad hoc informational sessions related to the job.

- 31.37 The employee will participate in those training activities mandated for all employees in the ethics, civil rights, employee and human relations areas (or other areas mandated by the Agency, the Department, regulation or law).
- 31.38 The IDP may be revisited at any time should the supervisor's assessment change or the employee seek training later in the year. Such training at the employee's request will be made available to the extent funds are available.
- 31.39 If at any stage of the IDP review process requested training and/or opportunity for career development is not approved, the individual shall be advised.
- 31.40 After an employee has satisfactorily completed a training course, a record of the completed training will be filed electronically in a training database. Employees may request a copy of their individual training records by contacting the Human Resources Division, Training and Development Branch (TDB). TDB will have six (6) working days to honor employee requests.

## LANGUAGE TRAINING POLICY

### WASHINGTON BASED INDIVIDUALS

- 31.41 Management supports the development of foreign language proficiency of individuals, with an emphasis on the preparation of individuals for assignments where language skills are necessary to carry out the mission of the Agency. Supervisors shall encourage individuals to develop language skills and are encouraged to use the Agency Employee Recognition Program (e.g., quick track awards and other available forms of recognition) to acknowledge the skillful use of foreign language on the job.
- 31.42 The languages listed below are considered priority languages for career enrichment language training in Washington, because they are the principal working languages of countries in which the Agency has substantial program interests. The Agency will support training in these languages, in keeping with its language training policy. Training in other languages may be considered with appropriate justification from the employee.

Arabic	Italian	Serbian
Bulgarian	Japanese	Spanish
Chinese (Mandarin)	Korean	Thai
French	Polish	Turkish

German  
Indonesian

Portuguese  
Russian

Ukrainian  
Vietnamese

31.43 Support for language learning by Washington-based individuals will be available as follows:

- a. In-House Language Training: The Agency will continue to pay in full the cost of in-house language training for Arabic, Chinese Mandarin, French, Japanese, Russian and Spanish, or other priority languages for which there is both an Agency need and sufficient demand, and will endeavor to set up early morning or late-afternoon classes when sufficient numbers of individuals at similar ability levels are available to justify organizing these classes. In-house classes will normally be held between the hours of 7:00 to 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 to 7:00 p.m.
- b. Early-morning language training at the NFATC or other outside facilities approved by management:
  1. Early-morning language training at the National Foreign Affairs Training Center (NFATC), Department of State, or other management approved facilities is to be used for maintenance and improvement of a pre-existing language competency. Management will continue to pay, in full, the cost of language maintenance/improvement training at NFATC or other approved facilities (provided that the cost and time expended do not exceed that required by NFATC) for any individual with a minimum proficiency level of S-2/R-2 in basic languages and a S-1/R-1 in intermediate and hard languages. As proof of meeting the requirements stated above, an individual must have a language test score on file with the SPO, issued within the past five years by an approved testing facility.
  2. Reimbursement for travel costs related to this training will be governed by current Federal travel regulations.
  3. Management will not charge individuals leave to attend in house or early-morning language classes as described in 31.43b 1 and 2 above. However, individuals enrolled in these language classes must establish tours of duty such that they are not absent from work for more than a total of 5 hours per week, as a result of this language training.
- c. Language training outside of duty hours: All individuals are encouraged to undertake language study in any of the languages listed in this section at the USDA Graduate School, private universities or colleges, or other agencies.

The Agency will pay the cost of formal classes taken in any language that is directly related to the work of the Agency, up to a maximum outlay per individual of \$500 per year. Upon completion of the course, the individual must provide the SPO with a transcript indicating the final grade earned in the course. Any individual who does not receive a passing grade, must reimburse the Agency for the full cost of the course and materials.

- d. Self-study programs: Language materials for self-study will be provided to individuals by the SPO upon request. However, such materials remain the property of the Agency and must be returned to the SPO. Enrollment in these programs may be processed through the SPO.
- e. Tutorial language training programs: Proposals for tutorial language training programs will be evaluated by the Agency on a case-by-case basis.
- f. Language books and materials: Normally, the cost of books and/or materials for language training courses will be covered in full by the Agency. However, items such as dictionaries and miscellaneous reference materials will not be covered, unless approved in advance by the SPO.

#### TRAINING FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH FOREIGN ASSIGNMENTS

- 31.44 Policies pertaining to foreign language training for foreign assignments are based upon evolving needs. Management may authorize language training in foreign countries in cases where the individual's personal situation and the availability of adequate foreign training facilities and funding make this a viable option to meet the Agency's needs.

#### LENGTH OF LANGUAGE TRAINING

- 31.45 Management will provide up to the following lengths of training per language category:

Basic	24 weeks
Intermediate	44 weeks
Hard	52 weeks
Additional	8 weeks

- 31.46 Languages, by category, approved for training as of the effective date of this agreement can be found in Article 24. Management reserves the right to add to or delete from the languages under each category based on Agency needs, in consultation with AFSA. An up-to-date list of the languages can be found in FAS Notice, "Language Proficiency Requirements for Commissioning of Foreign Service

Officers and for Incentive Pay.” This notice can be found in the Overseas Administrative Handbook on the FASTnet and currently on the FAA Home page.

## GUIDELINES

- 31.47 Time and funding permitting, the standard lengths of training indicated above will be applied to training at NFATC and other management-approved facilities, and for tutoring, immersion courses overseas, or other appropriate training. The decision will be made on the basis of both the funds available and the efficacy of the training. The length of training may be extended for individuals who are highly motivated to achieve higher than the minimum levels of competence, and who have demonstrated the ability to master difficult languages.

## LANGUAGE TRAINING WHILE ON FOREIGN ASSIGNMENTS

- 31.48 The Agency will continue to routinely approve language training for individuals on foreign assignments. Such training should impinge as little as possible on the office schedule. Office heads who are considering scheduling extensive language training for themselves or their American employees during office hours must consult with their Area Officers.
- 31.49 Where appropriate, the Agency will support intensive language training for individuals on foreign assignments, consisting of 30 to 60 days of full-time language training. It is the responsibility of the individual to develop an appropriate and effective training program, which must be approved at post and by the appropriate Area Officer.
- 31.50 Office heads shall normally request training in the post's General Authorization (GA) plan, which is approved by the appropriate Area Officer. Other training not included in the original GA, must also be approved by the appropriate Area Officer.

## TRAINING PRIOR TO FOREIGN ASSIGNMENT

- 31.51 As preparation for a foreign assignment, each individual, coordinating with his/her FAA Area Director, shall develop a schedule of training which will normally include:
- a. Preparing for assignment abroad orientation;
  - b. Management or career development training, as appropriate and required;
  - c. Security orientation;
  - d. Area Studies;

- e. Consular Training, if necessary; and,
- f. Language Training, if necessary.

31.52 Career candidates should strive to be language qualified before their first assignment abroad. When this is not possible, management will provide the language training and testing opportunities, including training at post, identified as necessary for the candidate to successfully prepare for the language qualification exam.

31.53 Career candidates may be language qualified in any language described in FAS Notice, "Language Proficiency Requirements for Commissioning of Foreign Service Officers and for Incentive Pay." The notice can be found at in the Overseas Administrative Handbook on the FASTnet and currently on the FAA Home page. Management will normally only pay for training for commissioning in languages under the conditions listed in the FAS notice.

#### FAMILY MEMBER TRAINING

31.54 The Agency supports training for spouses only in the following areas (subject to funding availability) when accompanying individuals overseas:

- a. Language - the funding authorized for language training will normally be equivalent to State Department's FAST course, except for hard languages where it normally will be equivalent to twice the length of the FAST course or to that provided to the employee, funding permitting. The training may take place either in Washington or at post;
- b. Area Studies (full or part-time);
- c. Functional Training - spouses who are U. S. citizens may receive functional training, when appropriate and subject to available funding, to prepare them for anticipated employment in the Family Member Appointment Program; and,
- d. "Preparing for Your Overseas Assignment" orientation.

31.55 All dependents are eligible to participate in the Security Overseas Seminar and other programs of the Overseas Briefing Center.

#### DEPENDENT CARE

31.56 Dependent care reimbursements ("reimbursements") are subject to the availability of funds.

- 31.57 Reimbursements are calculated based on actual attendance in authorized training and for a reasonable time before and after the scheduled hours of the training to provide for travel time to and from the training facility. No reimbursements will be made for days the individual is absent from class or days when the class is not held.
- 31.58 Reimbursements are paid only to allow participation in training by spouses normally responsible for the care of dependent(s).

#### OVERSEAS TRAINING

- 31.59 The Agency will assist individuals in obtaining information on overseas study and training, in obtaining training materials, and in processing requests for training.

#### VARIANCE IN WORK HOURS

- 31.60 Requests for a variance in regular working hours and/or appropriate leave for training purposes will be granted unless it would interfere with the performance of the critical day-to-day mission of the Agency.